

Red Tape Untangled, Man Looks At Life With New Kidney

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By Steve Miller - WBBM Newsradio 780

(Chicago) -- Life has changed dramatically for a 24-year-old Morton Grove man - who has a new, healthy kidney - after his donor was forced to wade through three months of red tape.

Just a month ago, 24-year-old Erich Monzon was essentially a prisoner in one room for 14 hours a day - for dialysis.

Less than four weeks ago: Monzon received a kidney from his 41-year-old cousin, Ben Liggayu, who lives in the Philippines.

The surgery was done here in Chicago. Getting his cousin a visa to come here was the problem.

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky says the State Department was afraid the cousin would come here - and not leave - even though he has four children in the Philippines.

But through Schakowsky's efforts, the cousin was allowed to come here - and he donated a kidney to Erich Monzon.

"He made a major sacrifice, and I can never fully repay him for what he's done. He came here, he never met me before, and he was willing to selflessly give up one of his kidneys to help me."

Monzon's cousin says he's going back to the Philippines in July.

"I will go back to the Philippines because I miss my family."

Congresswoman Schakowsky says the law needs to be examined - to make room for people like Monzon's cousin - who clearly come for humanitarian reasons.

And Erich Monzon says now that he is not basically chained to dialysis 14 hours a day any more, he is free. One of his priorities, he says, is to eat foods he was never allowed before.

"So many things I want to go out and explore and try."

Monzon says he is feeling better - and looking forward to traveling to the Philippines at some point - and getting on with his life.